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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused February 5 news coverage on the court ruling made Thursday that a former KMT legislator was guilty of fraud for her possession of dual U.S. and Taiwan citizenship; on former Vice President Annette Lu's interview with President Ma Ying-jeou Thursday in her capacity as the founder of Formosa Media; and on other domestic political issues. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" discussed the recent U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and the tensions between China and the United States. The article urged the Ma administration not to turn Taiwan into an enemy of democratic countries by tilting toward China. An op-ed in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said the Obama administration's excessively high expectations for China have unfortunately resulted in the recent tensions between Washington and Beijing. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" discussed the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and concluded that "what the U.S. is selling is a sense of security. And Taiwan is happily buying it despite the exorbitant price." End summary.

A) "Taiwan Must Never Degenerate into Becoming the Enemy of the Democratic Camp"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] (2/5):

"... When [U.S. President Barack] Obama was plagued by the financial crisis in 2009, Sino-U.S. relations were on unusually friendly terms. But given the gradually eased financial storm and the fact that China is taking advantage of the difficult and unfortunate circumstances of the United States to make much ado of 'the dream of the rise of a big nation,' it appears that Obama has been ready to adjust his China policy starting in 2010. Under such a circumstance, President Ma Ying-jeou, who has just received courteous treatment during his transits through the United States, will probably need to figure out whether Washington offered him such treatment because of his tilting toward China or an attempt [by the U.S. side] to drag Ma from the wrong road of tilting toward China? ...

"For now, it is none of Taiwan's business as to how Beijing is going to battle with Washington and whether it is able to win the battle against Washington. This is China's business. But still, Taiwan needs to watch out so that it will not suffer as an innocent bystander. First, if Taiwan's economy continues to be locked into that of China's, a move that will tie trade and economics across the Taiwan Strait together, it will be extremely difficult for the island to escape its fate should any trade conflicts emerge between China and the United States. ... Second, the Ma administration sees Taiwan as a part of China -- an effort that will distance [Taiwan's] strategic interests from those of democratic countries. Should China and the United States start to vie with each other strategically in the future, Taiwan will degenerate from being a democratic ally in Asia to becoming an enemy of the democratic allies in Asia. The consequences will be inconceivable. ..."

B) "Behind Obama's Hard-line [Attitude] towards China"

Emerson Chang, Director of Nan Hua University's Department of International Studies, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (2/5):

"... First, the fact that the Obama administration had held excessively high expectations for Obama's visit to China in November, 2009 is a [reason for] the recent tensions between the two countries. Since taking over the helm, Obama has sought to draw a clear line between his administration and the previous Bush administration in terms of foreign relations. He upholds 'smart power' as his guiding principle, uses listening, negotiation and contacts as his key [skills], puts a special emphasis on pragmatism and flexibility, with which he seeks to mend the United States' international image and foreign relations. ... In his Tokyo address, Obama stressed that [the United States] will not seek to contain China, and he also pointed out that China's rise is conducive to world security and prosperity -- a move that smashed the doctrine calling China a threat and provided the most powerful justification for the path of peaceful development upheld by China. [Such a speech] can be regarded as the biggest gift a U.S. state leader has ever brought to Beijing during his visit to China since the two nations established diplomatic ties.

"What Washington sought in return was hoping that China can 'build a positive, cooperative and comprehensive U.S.-China relationship for the 21st century, and will take concrete actions to steadily build a partnership to address common challenges,' as specified in the 'Obama-Hu joint statement.' In other words, Obama expected to use goodwill and reconciliation in exchange for China's friendly cooperation. The first touchstone testing such expectations was whether Beijing would agree, as specified in the 'joint statement,' to adhere to 'providing for full transparency' when carrying out the carbon dioxide reductions at the Copenhagen summit. ...

"The failure of the Copenhagen talks confirmed the general public view that Obama has been too weak and has made too many concessions with regard to his China policy. Obama, as a result, tasted the bitter fruit of losing face. ... The Google incident showed that Obama did not adopt a weak attitude toward China, and the State Department's announcement of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, its reiteration of the Taiwan Relations Act and turning a blind eye to the three Sino-U.S. communiqués have further demonstrated Obama's remorse over the 'Obama-Hu joint statement.' Such a development, however, forced China to heighten and expand its level of protests so as to maintain face. ..."

C) "What Is the U.S. Really Selling Taiwan?"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (2/5):

"Washington and Beijing have been locking horns over the United States government's latest arms sales to Taiwan, as well as some other thorny issues, such as U.S. President Barack Obama's planned meeting with the Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. It remains to be seen what will become of the relations between the two superpowers -- and theirs with Taiwan. But one question needs to be asked about the arms sales: What is the U.S. really selling Taiwan? Or what does Taiwan think the U.S. government is selling? ...

"The Obama administration has not actually approved any new items for the package. ... But the Obama administration package excluded some of the promises that Bush had made to Taiwan: diesel-powered submarines and F16C/D jet fighters. This is the hardware. On the political side, the package comes as Washington's reiteration of its Taiwan Relations Act, which obliges it to sell defensive weapons to the island. ... The hardware that the U.S. is selling Taiwan is not sufficient to defend the island from the hundreds of Chinese

missiles targeting Taiwan. What the U.S. is selling is a sense of security. And Taiwan is happily buying it despite the exorbitant price. ... The sense of security does not come from the hardware, but rather from the implications attached to the weapons. The president may not really want to buy the weapons -- a time when Taiwan least needs to arm itself -- judging from the gradually easing tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

"But Ma needs to assure the nation -- particularly the pro-independence opposition camp -- that he will not surrender the nation if the occasion arises. He needs to play the game of maintaining military balance across the strait. Such a game does not depend on the number of troops or strength of the weapons on each side of the strait, but is maintained by the ambiguous position taken by the U.S. For both Taiwan and China, U.S. arms sales represent the possibility of U.S. intervention in cross-strait military conflicts. That is what Beijing has been protesting about. ... Would the U.S. really intervene? ... The sense of security may be false, not only because the U.S. may never come to Taiwan's defense, but also because the island actually lacks the determination to defend itself. Buying the weapons is not necessarily a demonstration of such determination, although the U.S. government has always insisted that Taiwan needs to illustrate its position by buying the defensive weapons offered to them. ... Some observers say the air force may not have the pilots to fly F16C/D jets even if the U.S. sells them to Taiwan. So the weapons systems Taiwan is getting from the U.S. may just be toys, or a Linus blanket that makes us feel safe."

STANTON